

My First Stories from the *Mahabharat*



Age
6+

Easy to read
Simple language

Colourful illustrations
Difficult words explained



The Mahabharat is the longest epic poem in the world, believed to have been recited by sage Ved Vyas and penned by Lord Ganesh.

One of the greatest classics of India, the Mahabharat is a gripping saga of revenge, jealousy, honour, friendship and brotherhood. The war between the cousins Pandavs and Kauravs is a crucial episode in the story, ending with the victory of those who followed the path of righteousness.

The mega epic, with its intriguing plots, sub-plots and twists, has been adapted into movies and television series in many Indian languages.

My First Stories from
the *Mahabharat*



My First Stories from the Mahabharat

ISBN: 978-93-5049-433-2

Printed in 2016

© Shree Book Centre

Retold by

Sunita Pant Bansal

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Printed in India

Published by



Shree Book Centre

8, Kakad Industrial Estate, S. Keer Marg, off L. J. Road
Matunga (west), Mumbai 400 016, India

Tel.: +91-22-2437 7516 / 2437 4559 / 2438 0907

Fax: +91-22-2430 9183

Email: sales@shreebookcentre.com

Website: www.shreebookcentre.com

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	4
1. King Shantanu and Ganga	5
2. The Princes of Hastinapur	17
3. The Kauravs and the Pandavs	28
4. The Greatest Archer of All Time	40
5. The Unknown Brother	52
6. The Palace of Lac	64
7. The Slaying of Hidimb and Bakasur	76
8. Draupadi's Swayamvar	88
9. The Pandavs Build Indraprasth	100
10. The Pandavs Go into Exile	112
11. Incognito in King Virat's Palace	124
12. The Kurukshetra War	136
<i>Meanings of Difficult Words</i>	148

Preface

The Mahabharat is one of the two great epics of India. It is the longest epic poem in the world, believed to be recited by Veda Vyas and written by Lord Ganesh.

Originally written in Sanskrit, the Mahabharat is the story of rivalry between brothers, friendship, betrayal, war, honour and revenge. It imparts an important message that those who follow the righteous path always emerge victorious.

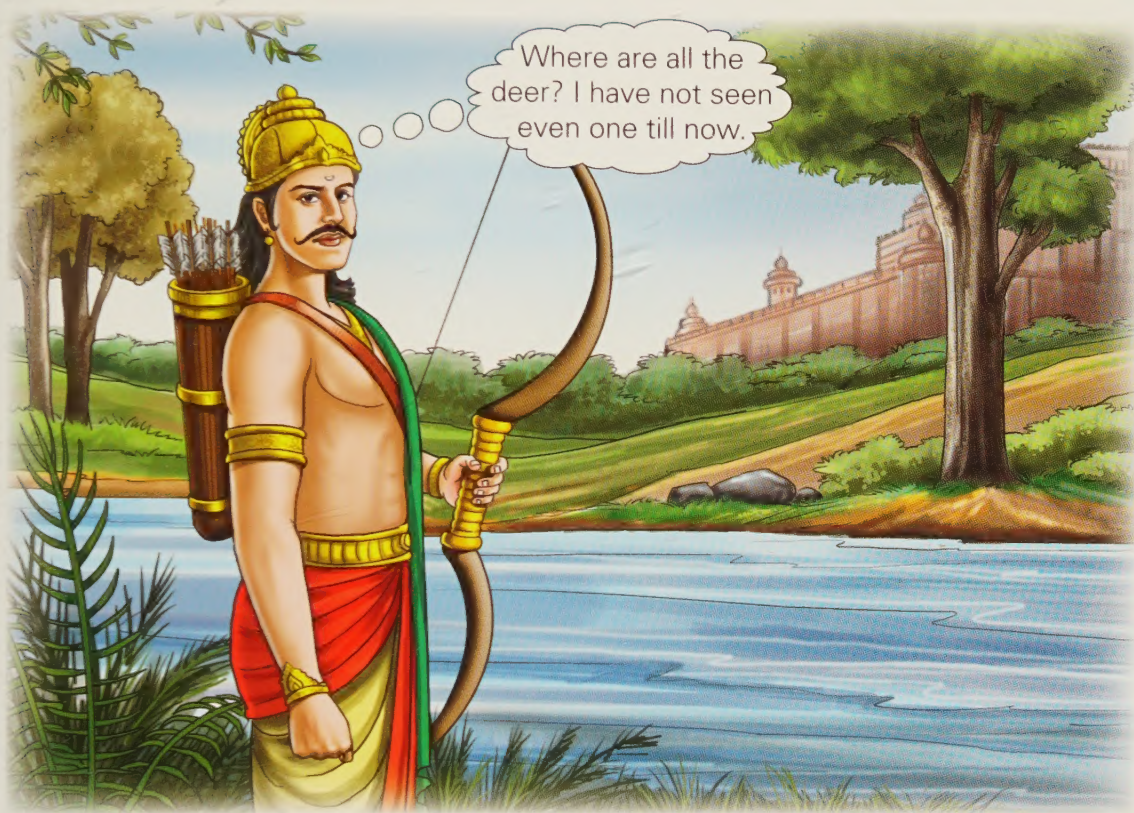
The Kauravs hated their cousins, the Pandavs, and were jealous of them. The Pandavs, who believed in dharma and duty, always had to face the wrath of the Kauravs. In the ensuing war between the cousins, good triumphs over evil, albeit with a heavy price—the loss of near and dear ones.

My First Stories from the Mahabharat is a collection of 12 carefully picked moral stories from the epic.

Written in simple language, accompanied by colourful illustrations, the book is targeted at the early readers of the Mahabharat, aged six and above. The dialogue bubbles help understand what the characters think and feel. The meanings of difficult words have been explained at the end of the book to enrich children's vocabulary.

Happy reading!

King Shantanu and Ganga



Long ago, there lived a wise and just king called Shantanu. He ruled over a kingdom in northern India with Hastinapur as the capital city.

One day, Shantanu was hunting near the banks of River Ganga when he saw a beautiful



maiden. He fell in love with her at once and wanted to marry her.

But the maiden had two conditions. She said, "You must not ask me who I am. No matter what I do, you must never question me. If you do so, I will leave you forever." Shantanu agreed, and soon they were married.

A year later, they had a son. But the queen took the baby and threw him into the river. Shantanu was horrified, but he remembered his promise and did not utter a word.

A year passed. They had another son. And once again the queen threw the newborn





into the river. This way, she drowned seven of their children.

When she was about to do the same to their eighth son, Shantanu could no longer stop himself.

He shouted, "Stop! I will not allow you to kill this child too. Tell me, who are you and why are you so heartless?"

The queen was shocked and sad. She said quietly, "Oh King! Why did you break your promise? I will have to leave you now. I am Ganga, the river goddess, and our sons were once the Vasus. They were cursed to be born on earth. They requested me to be their mother and kill them as soon as they were born so that they could be free



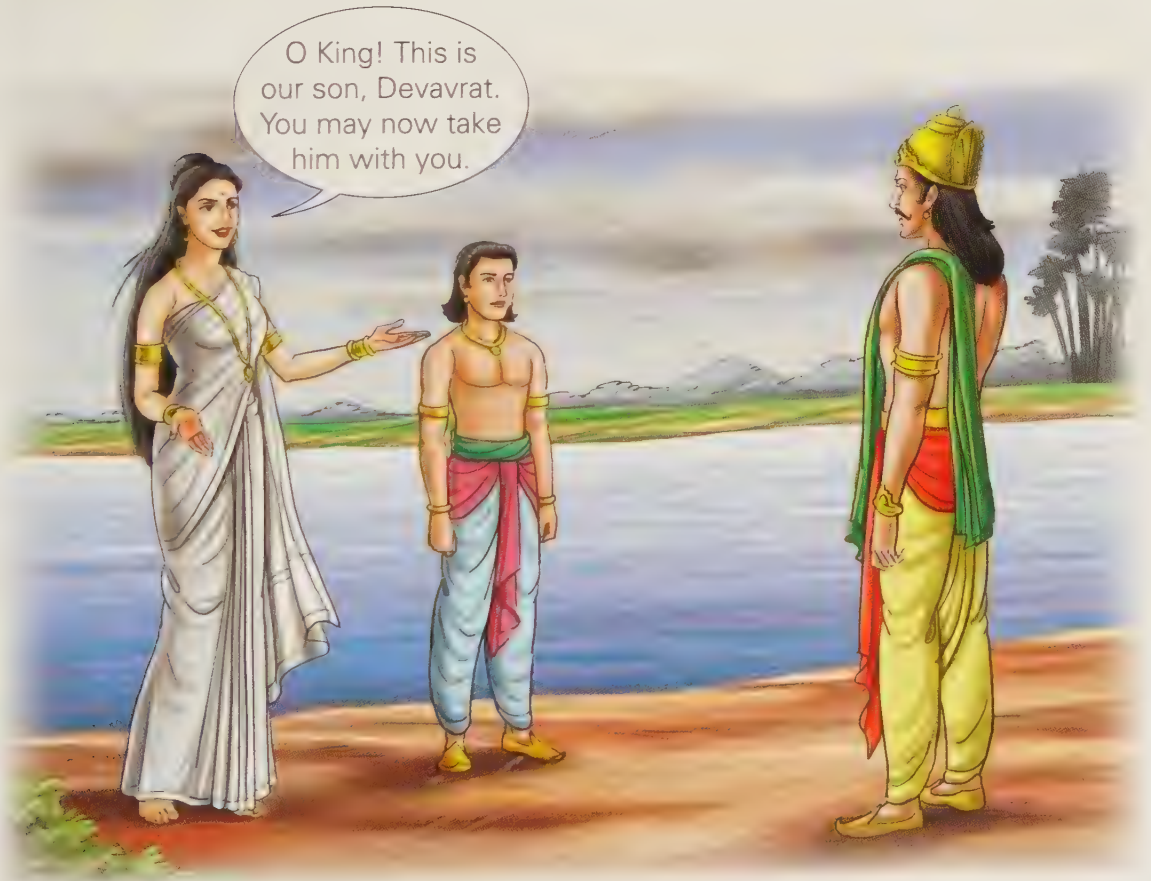


from the curse." Shantanu was stunned at what his wife told him. Seeing her husband so miserable, Ganga said, "Our eighth child will live a long life on earth. I have to leave you now, but I will give our son to you when he is grown up." With tears in her eyes, she vanished with the baby.

Many years passed. One day, Shantanu was wandering near the banks of River Ganga, thinking of his wife. He saw a lovely young boy.

Shantanu walked up to the boy and asked him, "Who are you, young boy?" Just then, Ganga came out of the river and said, "O King, this is our son. His name is Devavrat.

O King! This is
our son, Devavrat.
You may now take
him with you.





He has mastered archery and has learnt the Vedas well. It is now time for you to take our son with you."

Ganga blessed her son and disappeared. Shantanu was very happy and took Devavrat to the palace. The boy grew up to be handsome and intelligent. Shantanu looked at Devavrat

and thought, "One day, he will become an able king." But this was not to be.

One day, Shantanu met a beautiful fisherwoman named Satyavati and instantly fell in love with her.

Shantanu went to Satyavati's parents to ask for their permission to marry her.





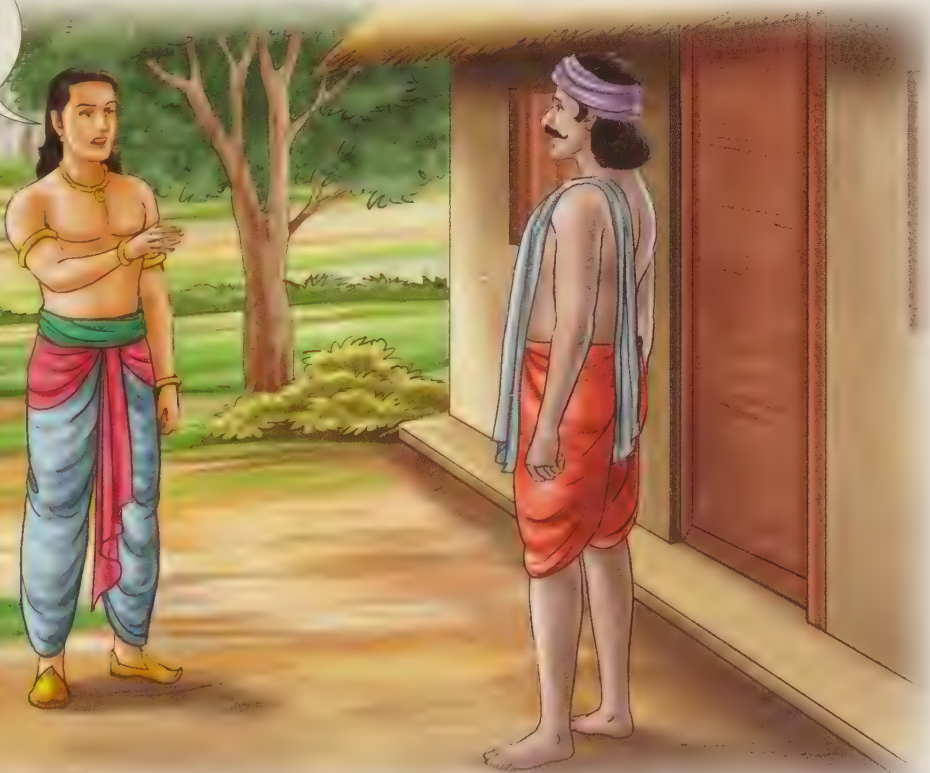
Satyavati's father said, "O King, I want you to promise that the son born to you and Satyawati shall succeed you."

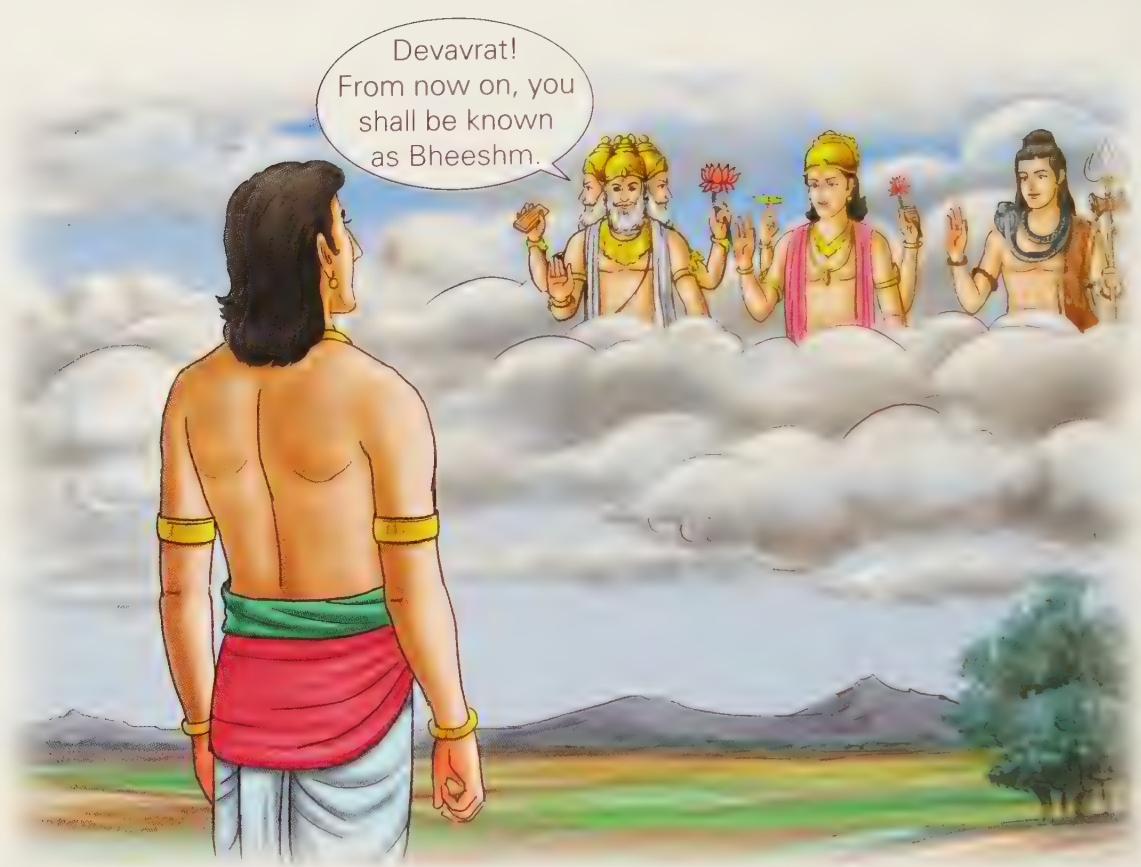
Shantanu did not agree to this demand. He already had a son and he wanted him to become the next king. He returned home disappointed. But he could not forget Satyawati. He lost all interest in life.

Devavrat noticed that his father was very sad. When he found out the reason behind it, he went to Satyavati's house.

Devavrat promised Satyavati's father that the son born to Satyavati and Shantanu would be the next king. The fisherman said, "But Devavrat, your children may claim the throne someday." Devavrat said, "I promise that I

O fisherman!
Satyavati's son
will be the
next king.





shall never marry. I will remain loyal to the King of Hastinapur and serve him all my life." The gods praised Devavrat and blessed him. They said, "From today, you shall be called Bheeshm. We bless you with a long life. You will die only when you wish to."



The Princes of Hastinapur



Shantanu married Satyawati and had two sons, Chitrangad and Vichitravirya. After Shantanu's death, Chitrangad was crowned the king. But unfortunately, he died young. So Vichitravirya became the King of Hastinapur. Bheeshm helped Vichitravirya rule the kingdom.

"It is time to find a suitable bride for Vichitravirya," Bheeshm told his stepmother, Satyawati. The King of Kashi was holding a *swayamvar* for his three daughters Amba, Ambika and Ambalika. Bheeshm decided to get all the three princesses married to Vichitravirya.



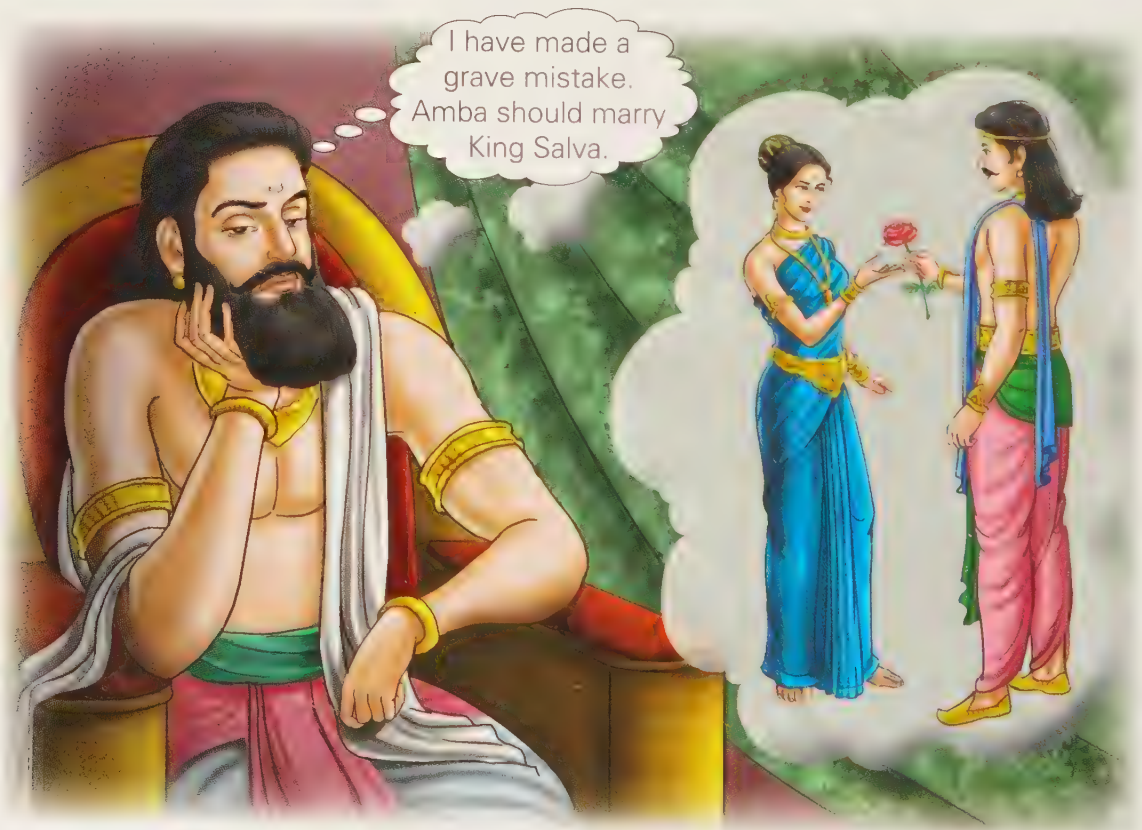


Bheeshm went to Kashi, defeated all the princes at the *swayamvar* and brought the three princesses to Hastinapur.

But Princess Amba was in love with King Salva and wanted to marry him. When Bheeshm came to know this, he realised it was not fair to get Amba married to Vichitravirya.

So Bheeshm sent Amba to King Salva. He got the other two princesses married to Vichitravirya.

However, King Salva refused to marry Amba. He told her, "Amba, I lost you in a fight with Bheeshm. I cannot marry you now. Go back to Hastinapur and marry Vichitravirya or Bheeshm."





Amba went back to Hastinapur. But Vichitravirya told her, "I cannot marry you knowing that you love someone else." She then asked Bheeshm to marry her, but he refused. He said, "I have vowed never to marry. Forgive me, princess." Princess Amba felt humiliated. She wanted to kill Bheeshm. So she began to pray to Lord Shiv.

Shiv was pleased with her devotion and appeared before her. He said, "Amba, take this garland. Whoever wears it will be able to kill Bheeshm." Amba then took the garland to many warriors and requested them to wear it and kill Bheeshm. But no one was willing to wear the garland and fight Bheeshm.





Filled with grief and rage, Amba threw the garland in the kingdom of Panchal and killed herself. Later, she was reborn as a man called Shikhandi. Shikhandi picked up the garland in Panchal and wore it around his neck.

Meanwhile, in Hastinapur, Vichitravirya died without a child. The kingdom had no heir.

Satyavati went to her first son, Vyas. She told him, "With your powers, please bless Ambika and Ambalika with sons." Vyas agreed to do so.

Vyas meditated for days together and therefore looked unkempt. So, when Ambika was blessed by Vyas, she closed her eyes. So her son Dhritarashtra was born blind.





When Ambalika saw Vyas, she turned pale with fear. So Pandu, the son born to her, was weak and sick. Satyavati requested Vyas to bless Ambika again. "I wish the child is healthy," thought Satyavati. But Ambika did not want to see Vyas again. So she sent her maid to Sage Vyas.

"Wear my robes and go to Vyas. Everyone will think it is me visiting the sage," Ambika told her maid. Vyas blessed the maid. A healthy boy named Vidur was born to her.

The three brothers grew up together under Bheeshm's guidance. Bheeshm took care of the kingdom till they were capable of ruling it themselves.





Dhritarashtra married Gandhari, the Princess of Gandhar. To support her blind husband, she blindfolded herself. Pandu married Princess Kunti, the daughter of Kuntibhoj and Madri. Vidur married the daughter of King Devak.

Days passed. Bheeshm decided to declare the new king of Hastinapur. As Dhritarashtra was blind, Pandu was made the king. Vidur became the chief minister.



The Kauravs and the Pandavs



One day, King Pandu went hunting. He heard a noise behind a bush. Assuming it was a deer, he shot an arrow towards the bush. Alas! It was a sage and his wife. The arrow struck the sage and wounded him badly.

The sage cursed Pandu, "I was just resting here with my wife and you have killed me

for no reason. You will die if you touch any of your wives!"

Pandu was heartbroken. He returned to the palace and told his wives about the incident. He decided to give up his royal life and do penance in the forest. He handed over the kingdom to his brother Dhritarashtra and



went to the forest, dressed as an ascetic. His wives Kunti and Madri also went with him.

Dhritarashtra became the king. Vidur and Bheeshm helped him rule the kingdom. Pandu lived in the forest, praying he be forgiven for his sin. He had no peace of mind. He longed for a child. Kunti could not bear to see her





husband so sad. She then remembered a boon granted to her by Sage Durvasa.

When she was young and not married, she had served Durvasa at her father's palace. Durvasa was pleased with her and granted her a boon. "I will teach you a mantra. When you chant the mantra, you can call any god

of your choice and he will bless you with a child," Durvasa said.

Kunti was curious. "Will it really work?" she wondered. She prayed to the sun god, Surya, and chanted the mantra. Surya appeared before Kunti. And instantly, Kunti had a baby in her arms. The child was lovely. He had a golden armour and earrings.





"No one can defeat him as long as he wears the armour and earrings," Surya said and disappeared.

Kunti was stunned. She was not married and could not keep the baby with her. So she placed the baby in a basket and set it afloat in the river without letting anyone know.

Kunti prayed some kind person would take care of her son.

Now, in the forest, Kunti told Pandu about her boon. But she did not tell him about her first son. Pandu was thrilled. Kunti chanted the mantra, and called upon Lord Dharma, the God of Justice. Thus, Yudhishthir was born.

Forgive me,
my son. I do not
want to let go of you,
but I have no
choice.





Lord Dharma blessed the child and said, "Yudhishthir will always be truthful."

Kunti then uttered the mantra again and prayed to Lord Vayu, the God of Wind. She had another son. Pandu and Kunti named him Bheem. Lord Vayu said, "Bheem will have the strength of a thousand elephants." Next, Kunti called upon Lord Indra, the King

of Gods. Arjun was born. Lord Indra said, "Arjun will be the best archer and no one will be able to defeat him."

Then Kunti taught the mantra to Madri. Madri chanted the mantra thinking of the twin gods Ashwini-Kumar. She had twins Nakul and Sahadev.





The twin gods blessed the children and said, "They will be intelligent and handsome."

The five sons of Pandu were called the Pandavs. Pandu, Kunti, Madri and the Pandavs lived happily in the forest. But this happiness did not last long. One day, Pandu died due to the sage's curse. Madri then gave up her life.

Alone and helpless with five children, Kunti had no choice but to return to Hastinapur. Bheeshm and Dhritarashtra received Kunti and her sons happily.

Gandhari too welcomed Kunti and said, "Do not worry, sister. We are all here for you. Your sons shall grow up with my children."





Dhritarashtra and Gandhari had a hundred sons and they were called the Kauravs. The Kauravs and the Pandavs grew up together under Bheeshm's care.



The Greatest Archer of All Time



Bheeshm was in charge of the young Kauravs and the Pandavs. He saw that Duryodhan, the oldest of the Kauravs, was very jealous of the Pandavs.

"I wish the Pandavs had stayed in the forest and had not come here at all," muttered

Duryodhan. "Yudhishthir is older than me, and one day he will become the king instead of me."

Bheeshm tried to tell Duryodhan that he should not be jealous of his cousins but Duryodhan did not listen to him and continued to hate the Pandavs.



Bheeshm appointed Kripa to teach the princes the Vedas and Dron to teach them warfare. A *gurukul* was set up near Hastinapur.

Of all the princes, Dron loved Arjun the most. He told everyone, "Arjun will become the greatest archer of all time." This made Duryodhan and his younger brother Dushasan





jealous of Arjun. One day, Duryodhan complained to Dron, "Guruji, you are being partial to Arjun. How can you say that he is a better archer than us?"

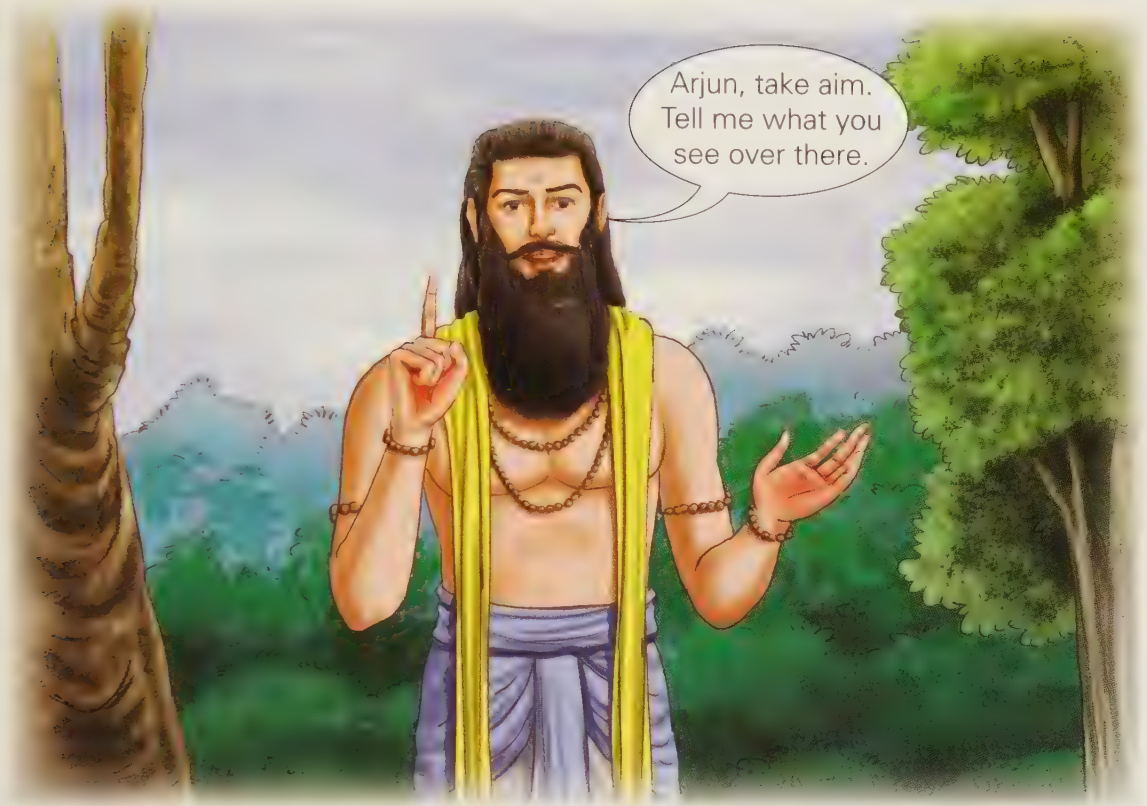
Dron did not reply. Instead, he placed a wooden bird on the branch of a tree and asked his students to gather around the tree.

Dron asked each of them to shoot the bird's eye.

The princes got ready with their bow and arrow. Dron asked them, "What do you see?"

Yudhishthir was the first. He said, "I can see you, the tree, my brothers and the bird." Bheem came next. He said, "I can see the





clouds, the tree and the bird." One by one, all the princes came forward, except Arjun. Everyone gave a similar answer. Dron said that all of them would miss the target.

Dron then called Arjun and asked him the same question. Arjun replied, "I can see only the eye of the bird." Dron turned

to Duryodhan and said, "A great archer always sees only his target and nothing else." Duryodhan was not happy. His jealousy grew stronger.

Meanwhile, a poor boy named Eklavya lived near the *gurukul*. He hid behind a tree and watched the princes practise archery. He too wanted to learn archery from Dron.





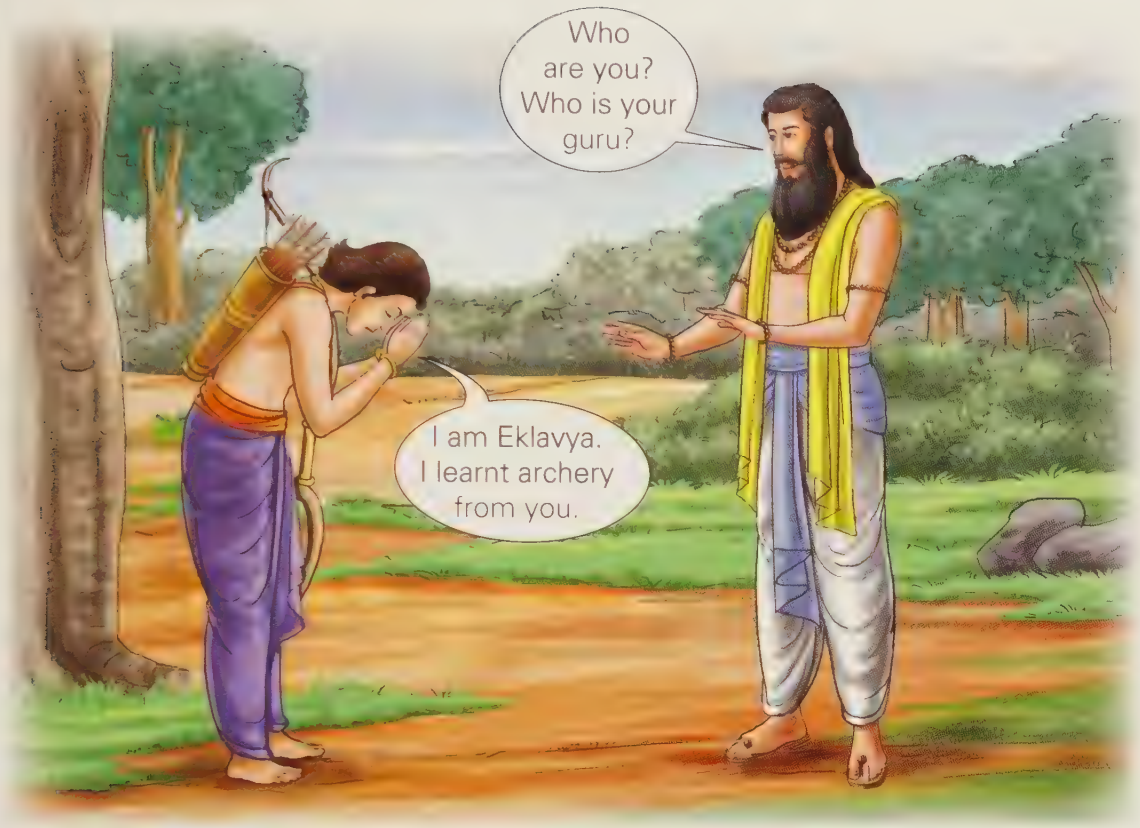
But he knew the guru would not accept him as his student because he came from a low caste.

But Eklavya wanted Dron as his guru at any cost. So he made a clay idol of Dron and placed it outside his hut. He believed the idol to be his teacher and practised archery.

Years passed. One day, when Eklavya was practising archery, a barking dog disturbed him. So he shot arrows into the dog's mouth to shut him, without hurting the animal.

The princes were amazed to see this. Dron walked up to Eklavya and asked him, "Who are you? Who is your guru?"





Eklavya was pleased to see Dron in person. He folded his hands and said, "I am Eklavya. You are my guru!" He then showed Dron the clay idol. Dron was impressed. "This boy has mastered archery all by himself," he thought to himself. But Dron was also worried. "Eklavya seems to be better than Arjun at archery. I cannot let that be. I

have vowed to make Arjun the best archer in the world."

After thinking hard, Dron told Eklavya, "You say that I am your guru. I demand a *guru dakshina*. I want your right thumb."

The princes were shocked. Eklavya knew he would not be able to shoot arrows without his right thumb.





But Eklavya did not hesitate. He cut his right thumb and placed it before his guru Dron as *guru dakshina*.

Thus, Dron made sure that Arjun would be the greatest archer of all time.



The Unknown Brother



The Kaurav and Pandav princes completed their training successfully. Now, it was time for them to give Dron their *guru dakshina*. Dron knew what he wanted. He and his childhood friend, Drupad, had a long history of enmity. Drupad was now the King of Panchal.

Dron asked the princes to capture Drupad. The Kauravs fought hard but failed to capture Drupad. They returned empty-handed.

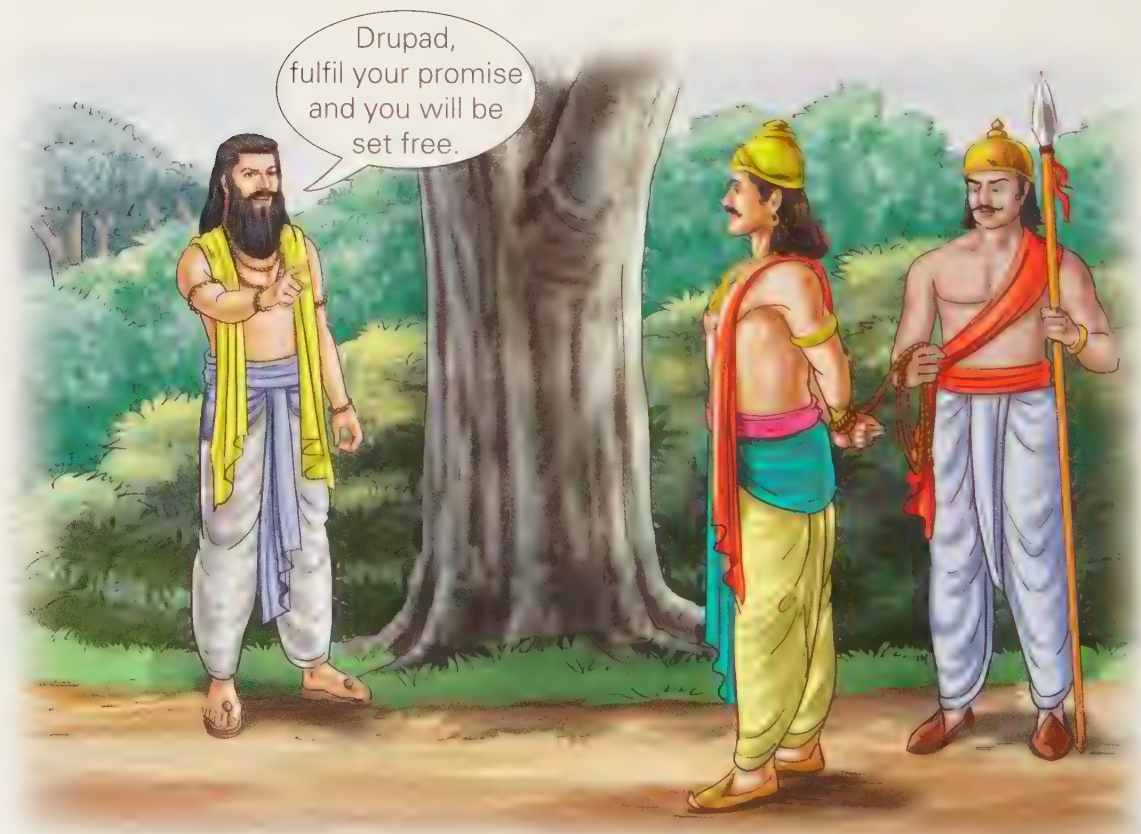
Dron then sent the Pandavs. They defeated Drupad and brought him to Dron. Dron reminded Drupad of his promise long ago to give him half of Panchal.



Dron asked Drupad to fulfil the promise. After receiving half the kingdom of Panchal, Dron set Drupad free.

Drupad went back to his palace humiliated. But he was impressed with the skilled young archer Arjun.

Drupad prayed for a son who could kill Dron and a daughter who could marry Arjun.





The gods blessed Drupad with grown-up children, Dhrishtadyumn and Draupadi.

Meanwhile, the Kauravs and the Pandavs returned to their palace. A big event was organised for the princes to display the skills they had learnt at the *gurukul*. The royal family and the citizens of Hastinapur

assembled in the arena to watch the display of skills.

The event began. Yudhishtir was the best charioteer. Bheem and Duryodhan were declared equal at mace fight. Nakul and Sahadev were the best with the sword.

Finally, it was time for the archery contest. Arjun stepped forward. He shot arrows in



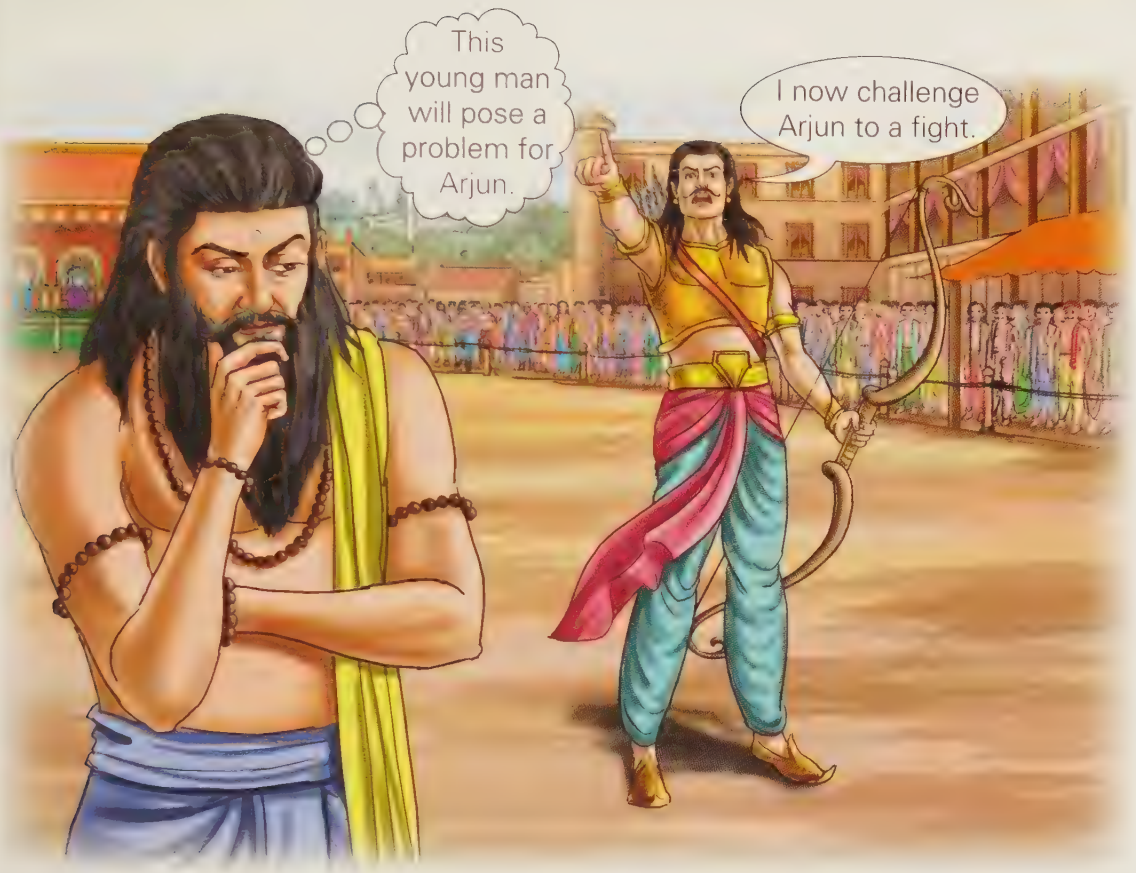


the sky and brought rain. He built a bridge of arrows in the sky. Everyone applauded.

Dron was about to declare Arjun the winner when someone in the crowd said, "Wait! Do not announce the winner yet. Give me a chance to prove myself." Everyone turned to the speaker. He was tall and handsome and wore a golden armour.

Everyone wondered who he was but Kunti recognised him at once. He was her first son, born with the blessings of Lord Surya. The young man stepped forward and said, "I can do everything that Arjun has just done." He repeated all the feats that Arjun had performed. The crowd cheered for the





newcomer. Then the young man challenged Arjun to a fight.

Dron was worried. "This young man sounds confident. He may even defeat Arjun. I cannot let this happen," he thought. So Dron tried to stop the duel. He asked the young man who he was. He replied, "I am Karn, the son

of a charioteer.” Kunti understood that a charioteer had saved her son and raised him.

Dron immediately said, “Oh! So you are not from a royal family. Then you have no right to participate in this competition or challenge Arjun.”

The crowd started laughing at Karn. Karn was humiliated.





Kunti wanted to stop the crowd from jeering her son, but she kept quiet. She did not want to give her secret away.

Duryodhan recognised Karn's talent. He thought, "This man can surely defeat Arjun. I must help him fight against Arjun. I must make him my friend." So he walked up to Karn and said aloud, "The kingdom of Ang is

under me and I can make anyone the king of this region. I declare Karn the King of Ang.”

Karn was very happy. He thanked Duryodhan and said, “For this generous gesture, I will always be your friend.” Duryodhan hugged Karn and then turned to Dron. “I hope he can now enter the contest and fight Arjun,” said Duryodhan.





But Dron refused to let Karn participate in the competition. Kunti was extremely sad that her eldest son was being humiliated. Yet she remained silent. Arjun was declared the best archer. A furious Duryodhan rode away in his chariot with his new friend.

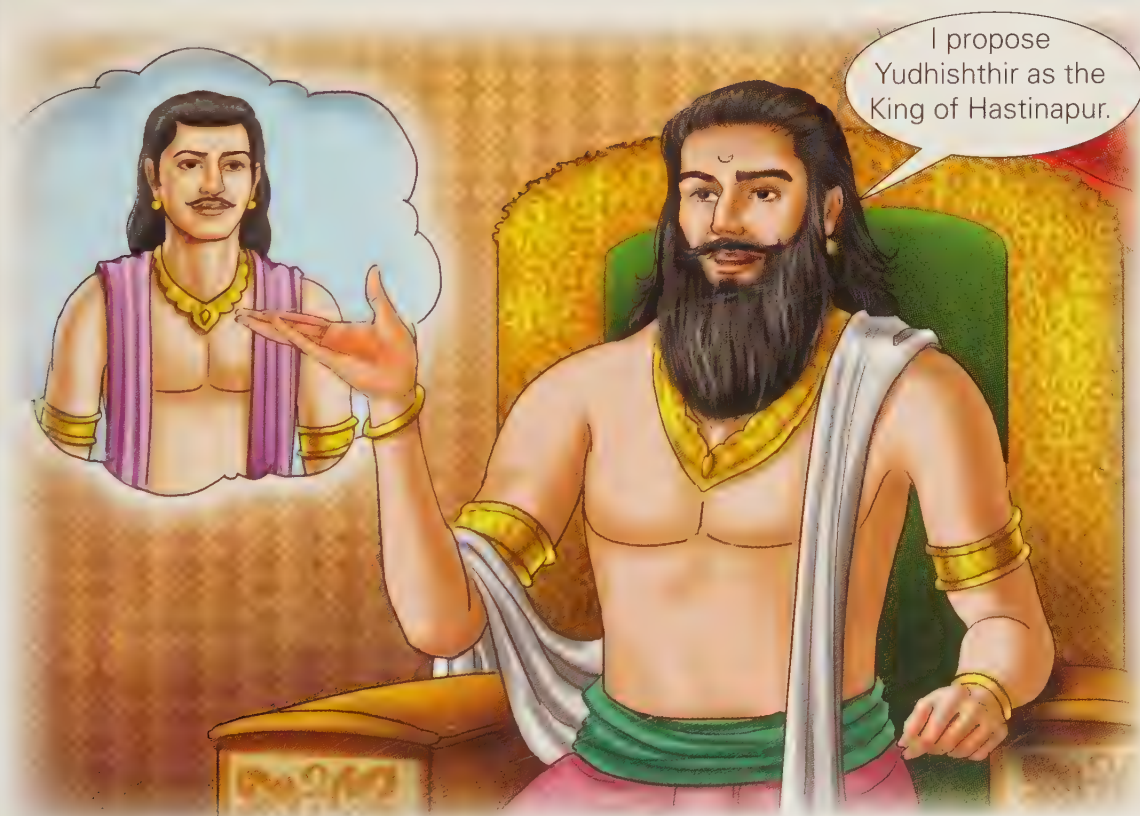


The Palace of Lac



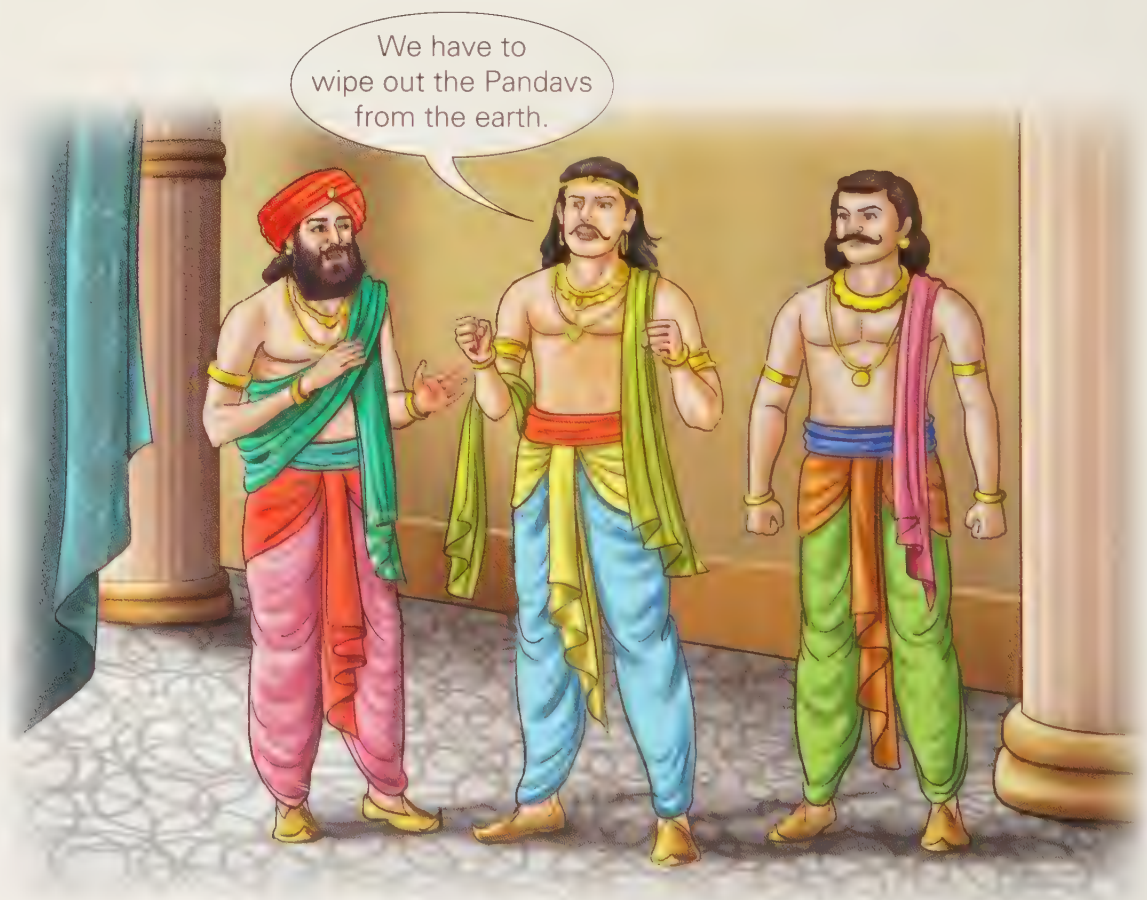
Years passed. King Dhritarashtra became old. He decided to name his successor. So he called Bheeshm, Vidur, Dron and all the ministers. He told them, "Let us crown Duryodhan the next king." But nobody, except Duryodhan's uncle Shakuni, supported

Dhritarashtra's suggestion. Bheeshm and the others wanted Yudhishtir to be the next king. "Yudhishtir is the oldest of all the Kauravs and the Pandavs. He has to be the next king," said Bheeshm. Dhritarashtra could not refute this argument. He finally agreed and named Yudhishtir his successor.



Duryodhan was furious when he heard his father's decision. Dushasan and Shakuni rushed to Duryodhan as they knew he would be frustrated.

"I will have to kill all the Pandavs. Only then can I become the king!" screamed Duryodhan.





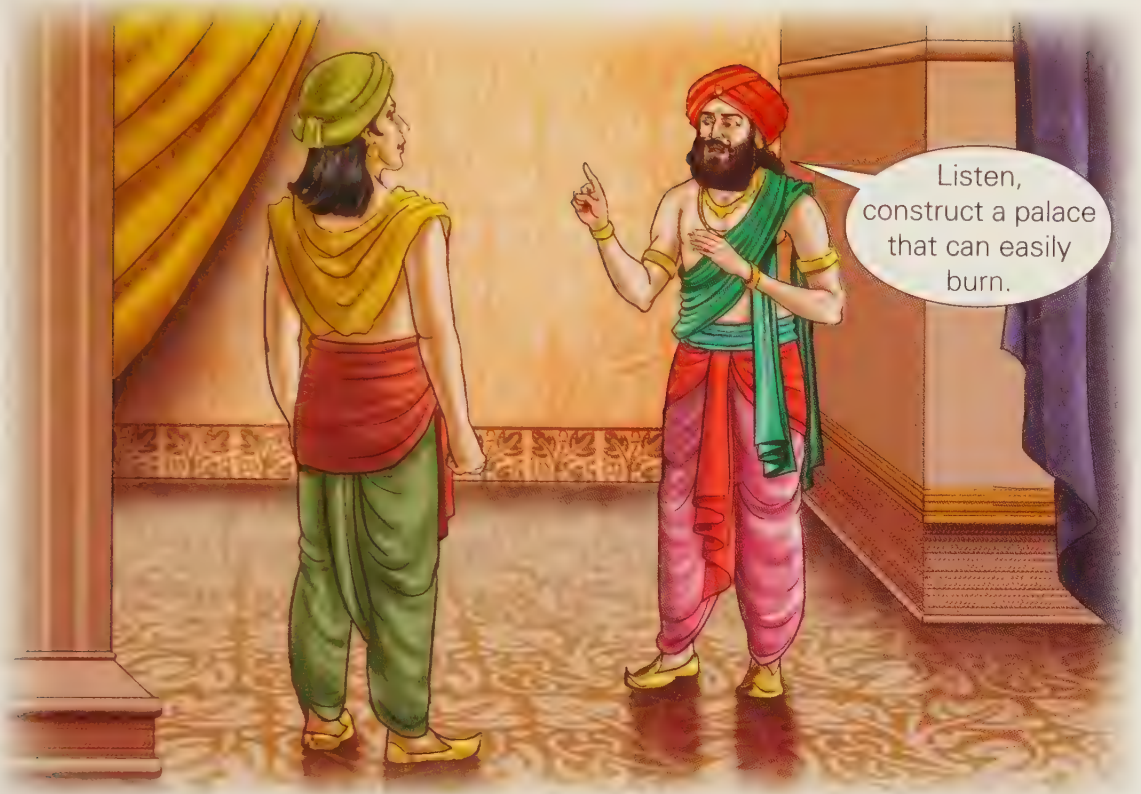
Shakuni was a clever but wicked man. He told his nephew, "Do not worry, Duryodhan. We will kill them all, but let us wait for the right opportunity."

And the opportunity arrived soon. A fair was being held in the nearby town of Varnavat. The people of the town sent an invitation to the King of Hastinapur.

Dhritarashtra decided to send the Pandavs to the event on his behalf. The Pandavs agreed to go. They requested their mother Kunti to come along with them.

The organisers in Varnavat decided to build a temporary palace for the five princes and their mother.





Duryodhan and Shakuni decided to kill the Pandavs at Varnavat. Shakuni bribed the architect of the palace. He told him, "Build a palace that can easily burn. Once the Pandavs are inside the palace, we will set it on fire. This will put an end to all our problems and Duryodhan can become the king."

So the architect built a palace of lac.

Soon the Pandavs and Kunti set off to Varnavat. Duryodhan sent a trusted servant along with them. He ordered the servant to burn the palace when everyone was asleep inside. Though the plan was a highly guarded secret, Vidur came to know about this through his spies.

Burn the palace
when the Pandavs
and their mother are
fast asleep.



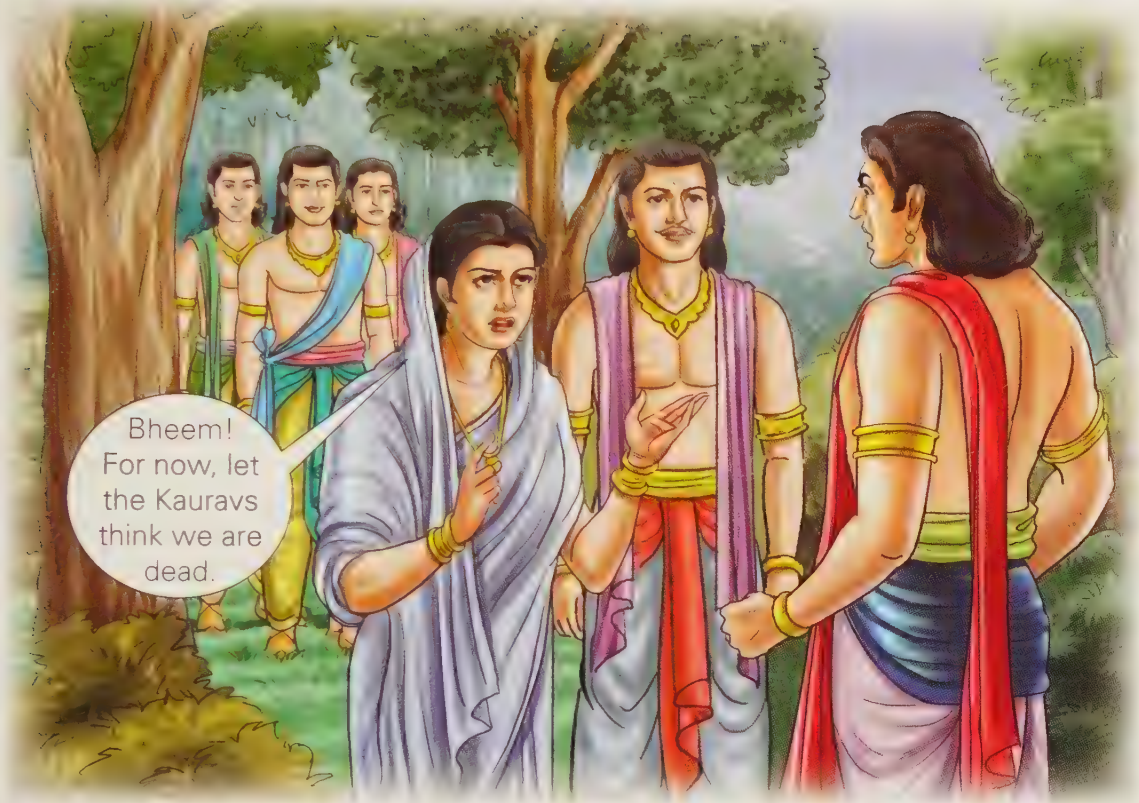


"I knew the Pandavs were in danger. Duryodhan will not leave them. He wants them dead," thought Vidur. He sent his servants to the palace in Varnavat. They secretly dug a tunnel from the palace to the nearby forest.

The Pandavs soon arrived at the palace in Varnavat. Vidur's spies told them about

Duryodhan's plan to burn down the palace. "You must escape through the tunnel we have dug for you," the spies told the Pandavs. That very night, the palace was set on fire. Thanks to Vidur, the Pandavs and Kunti escaped through the tunnel. When they came out of the tunnel, they saw the palace burning down. The Pandavs were very angry.





Bheem wanted to kill Duryodhan. But Yudhishtir and Kunti restrained him. Kunti said, "Bheem, let the Kauravs think we are all dead. Let us get away from here. We will live somewhere far from Hastinapur."

The Pandavs agreed to this. Arjun said, "For now, let them think we are dead. But some day, we will have our revenge."

Word reached Hastinapur that the palace in which the Pandavs were staying had burnt down to ashes. Dhritarashtra and the other elders were shocked. Bheeshm and Dron mourned for the Pandavs.

But Duryodhan, his brothers and their uncle Shakuni celebrated. "Hahaha! Now, no





one will stop me from becoming the next ruler of Hastinapur," said Duryodhan.

Vidur was the only one who knew that the Pandavs and Kunti were alive and that they had decided to go into hiding for some time. He did not tell anyone the secret.



The Slaying of Hidimb and Bakasur



The Pandavs and Kunti reached a forest far from Hastinapur. They decided to live there. They did not know that the forest was ruled by a ferocious demon called Hidimb. He loved eating human flesh.

As soon as the Pandavs arrived, Hidimb smelt them. "There are human beings here,"

he told his sister Hidimbi. "Hurry and get them for me, now!" he ordered. Hidimbi was not like her brother. She did not like to kill or eat human beings. But she was afraid of her strong brother. So she always listened to him.

Hidimbi reached the place where the Pandavs and their mother were resting.



Bheem was keeping guard. She instantly fell in love with Bheem. Using her magical power, she turned into a beautiful woman and approached Bheem.

Bheem was surprised to see a beautiful young woman all alone in the dense forest. He asked her, "Who are you? Why are you wandering alone?" She answered, "I am





Hidimbi. My brother is a mean demon and he rules this forest."

She was about to continue her story when Hidimb arrived. He was very hungry and could not wait for Hidimbi to come back with food. Hidimbi shouted to Bheem, "Look out! My brother wants to eat you and your family." Hidimb was furious. He roared, "Hidimbi!

You are in love with a human being. I will kill you along with the others.” But Bheem put up a good fight. After all, he had the strength of a thousand elephants!

Just then, the Pandavs and their mother woke up. Hidimbi ran to the Pandavs and explained everything to them.





Hidimbi begged the Pandavs, "Please help Bheem. Otherwise, my brother will kill him."

But Kunti assured her, "Do not worry. My son will easily defeat your brother."

Just as she said these words, Hidimb fell to the ground with a loud groan.

Hidimb was dead. Hidimbi asked Kunti if she could marry Bheem. Kunti realised that though Hidimbi was a demoness, she was good. So she got her married to Bheem.

The Pandavs lived in the forest for some time. Meanwhile, Bheem and Hidimbi had a son, Ghatotkach.





One day, the Pandavs came to know that Duryodhan's men were camping nearby. "They may recognise us. We have to move from here," said Kunti. Kunti and the Pandavs decided to go to the city of Ekachakra. But Hidimbi said, "After my brother's death, I am the queen of the demons here. I cannot leave them and come with you."

So Hidimbi stayed back with her son, while Bheem and the others carried on.

At Ekachakra, they disguised themselves as poor brahmins and took shelter in a kind brahmin's home. One day, the brahmin's wife was weeping inconsolably. Kunti went up to her and asked, "Why are you crying?" The woman replied, "A giant demon called Bakasur





lives outside the city. He used to attack us every day and kill many people and cattle for food.

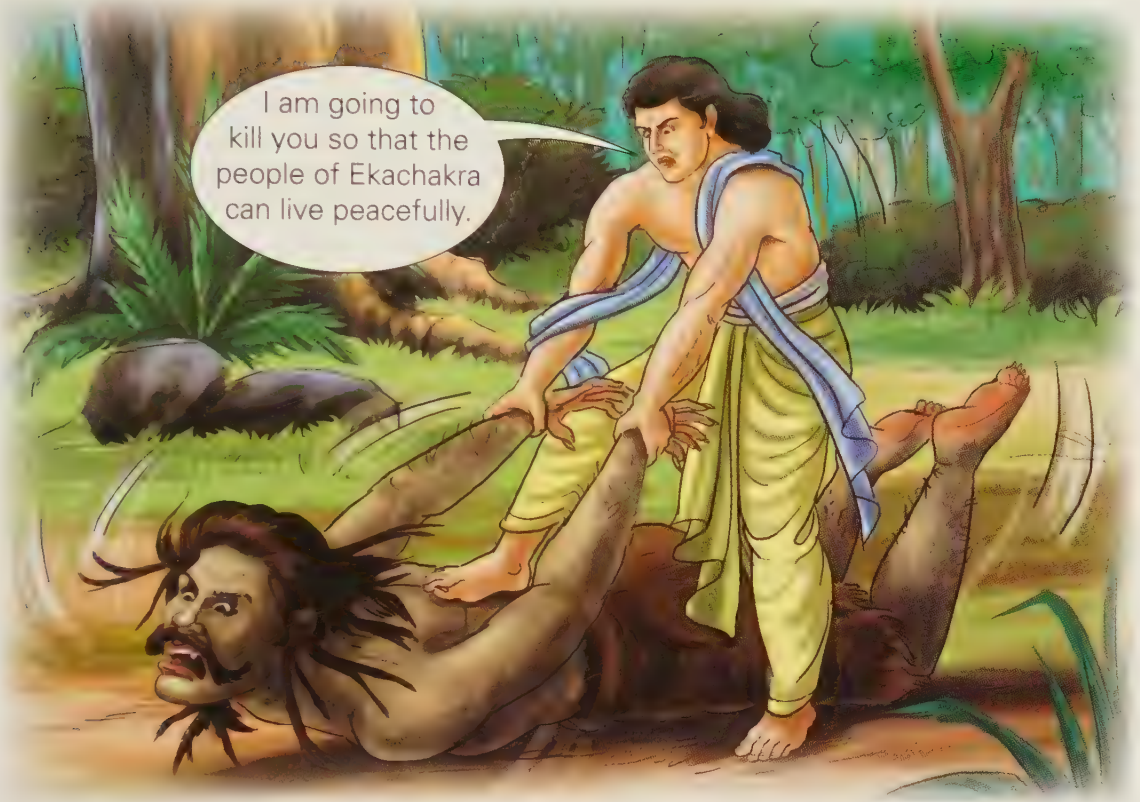
"To stop him from attacking us, the people decided to send him food instead. Every day, one person drives a bullock cart full of food to Bakasur. He eats the food, the bullock, as

well as the person driving the cart. Tomorrow, it is my son's turn to take food to Bakasur."

Kunti told her, "Do not worry, sister. I will send one of my sons tomorrow instead of your son."

The next day, Bheem went in the bullock cart. On the way, he ate all the food that was stacked in the cart. He rode very slowly.



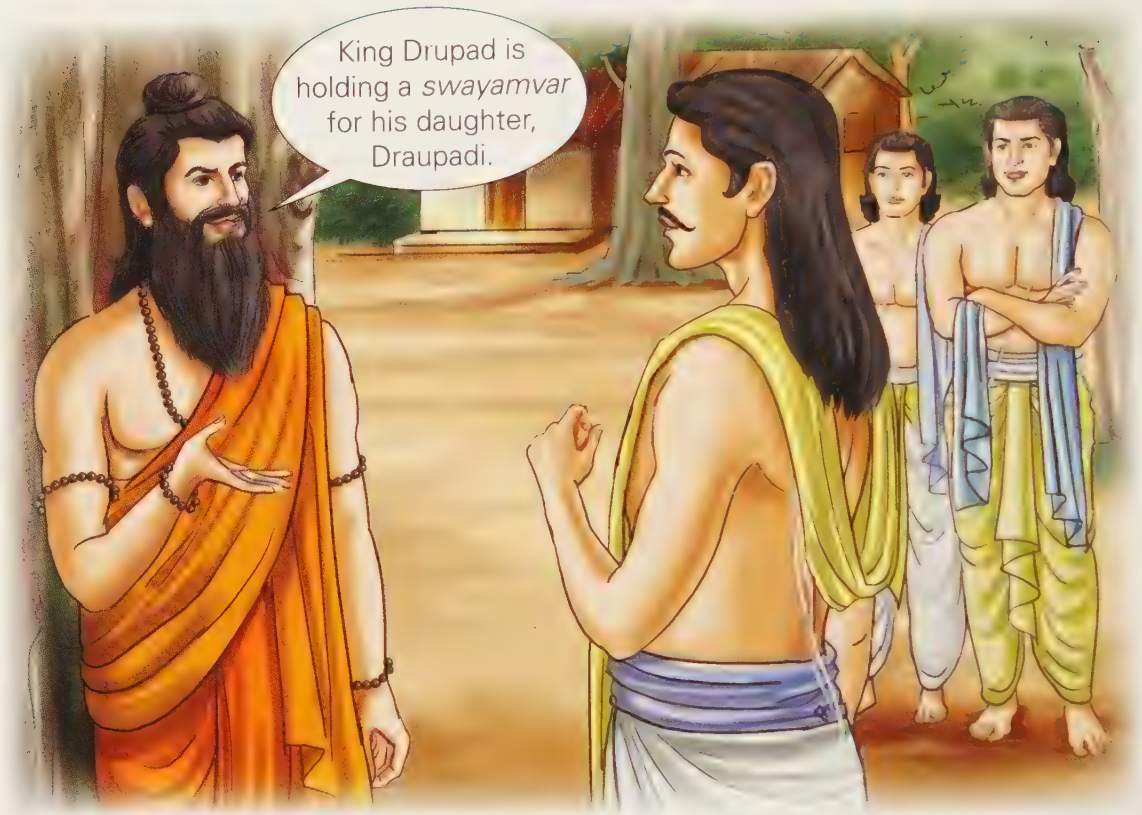


Bakasur was now very hungry. When he saw the empty cart, he became angry. He ran to Bheem. A terrible fight ensued and finally Bheem killed Bakasur.

When Bheem returned to Ekachakra, all the people of the town praised him. Their troubles were over, thanks to Bheem.



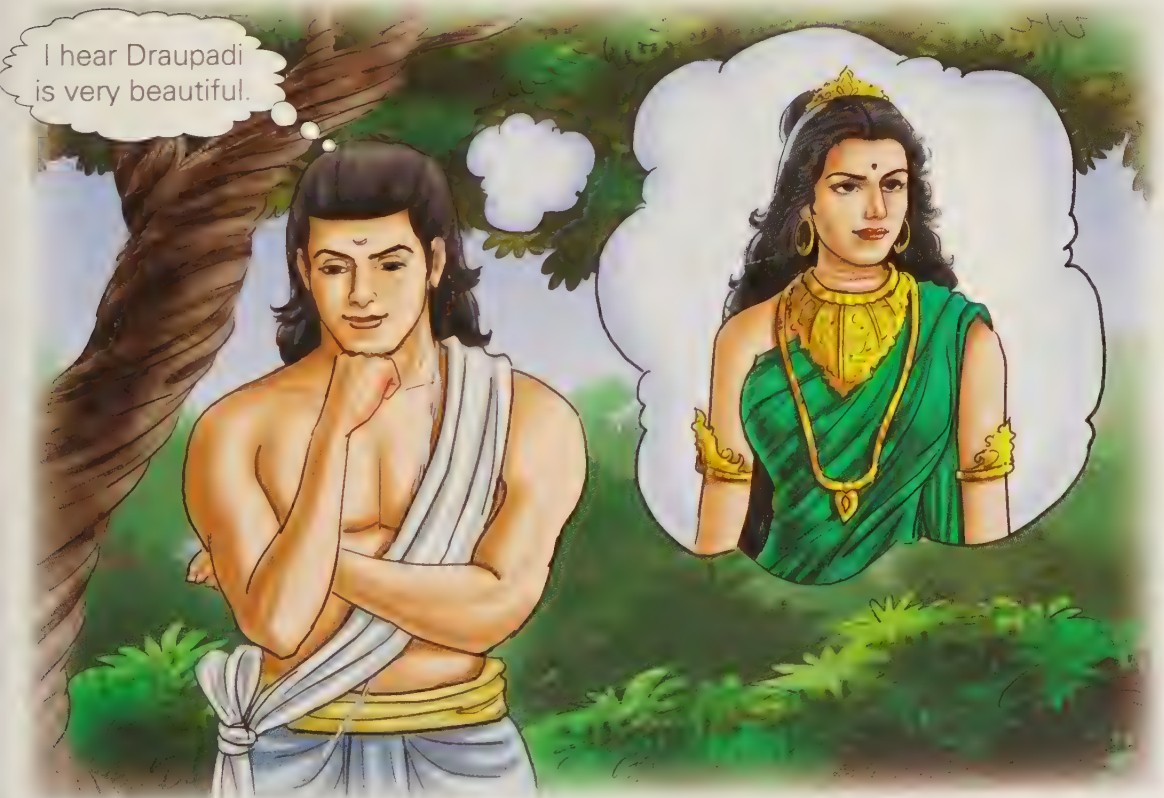
Draupadi's Swayamvar



The Pandavs continued to live in hiding. The Kauravs did not know that their cousins were still alive. One day, the Pandavs heard from a sage that King Drupad was holding a *swayamvar* for his beautiful daughter, Draupadi. "There will be an archery contest.

Whoever wins can marry Draupadi," the sage said.

Arjun decided to participate. He could never turn away from an archery contest. He had also heard a lot about Draupadi's beauty from his cousin Krishn. Krishn was friendly with Draupadi and loved her like his sister.



The Pandavs arrived at the court of Panchal, dressed as poor brahmins. There were many princes and kings seated in the court. Duryodhan and Karn were also present. The Pandavs were filled with anger on seeing Duryodhan and Karn, but they did not reveal who they were.





The Pandavs
are still alive; that
is for sure.

Will they attend
the *swayamvar*?

Draupadi was sitting next to her father. She looked beautiful in magnificent robes and jewellery. Krishna was also present there. He knew that the Pandavs were alive. He revealed this secret to King Drupad. Together, they planned a difficult contest so that only Arjun could win and marry Draupadi.

Dhrishtadyumn, Draupadi's twin brother, explained the rules of the contest. He said, "The contestant has to hit the eye of the wooden fish revolving above this bowl of water. But he cannot look directly at the target. He has to look at its reflection in the water. The winner will marry my sister."





One after the other, many contestants tried and failed. Then it was Karn's turn. Krishna knew Karn would win the contest. But he wanted Draupadi to marry Arjun. King Drupad too wanted Arjun as his son-in-law.

As Karn stepped forward to try shooting the fish's eye, Draupadi objected. "I do not wish to marry a charioteer's son," she

said. Krishn and Drupad were relieved. But Duryodhan was angry.

"How dare you insult my friend, the King of Ang?" he exploded. Draupadi replied in a calm voice, "He may be a king. But he still is the son of a charioteer."

Some of the people in the court laughed out aloud.





Duryodhan and Karn left the hall in a huff. "I will take revenge for this insult," said Duryodhan, as he went away.

Drupad began to worry that Arjun was not among the people gathered in the court. Just then, Arjun stepped forward, dressed as a brahmin.

Krishn recognised him immediately and silently prayed for him to succeed. Arjun picked up the bow and arrow and looked down into the water. He took aim and shot the arrow. It went straight and pierced the fish's eye. All the people present in the court were amazed. They applauded him.





Draupadi looked at Krishn. She thought, "Krishn is smiling. So that means this man is Arjun." She went to Arjun and placed a garland around his neck. They were married.

The Pandavs returned to Ekachakra with Draupadi. They stood outside their house and shouted, "Mother, look at what we have brought today."

Out of habit, Kunti said, "Share it equally among yourselves." Only when she came out and saw Draupadi, Kunti realised what she had just said. But she could not take back her words. So Draupadi became the wife of all the five Pandavs.





By this time, the people of the town had realised that the poor brahmin whom Draupadi had married was none other than Arjun. News reached Hastinapur that the Pandavs were still alive. Kunti feared for her sons' life but Krishna came to Ekachakra and assured her, "I will always be with the Pandavs and protect them."



The Pandavs Build Indraprasth



In Hastinapur, the elders of the royal family were happy to hear that the Pandavs were alive. Bheeshm advised Dhritarashtra to call back the Pandavs and give them their due. Dhritarashtra agreed. But Duryodhan was annoyed. "Why should we give them

anything? They were alive all this time and did not want to come back to Hastinapur,” he said. Despite Duryodhan’s objection, Dhritarashtra sent for the Pandavs. The Pandavs arrived at Hastinapur. Dhritarashtra received Kunti, her sons and her daughter-in-law, Draupadi, with warmth. Krishn too had accompanied the Pandavs.



The ministers of the kingdom were now in a fix. Duryodhan had already been crowned the king. But since Yudhishtir, the oldest of the Kauravs and the Pandavs, was alive, he ought to be the king. Dron and Vidur advised Dhritarashtra to give the Pandavs half the kingdom. This way, both Duryodhan and Yudhishtir could be kings. Duryodhan





was angry when he heard this. He did not want his kingdom to be divided and given away to the Pandavs.

To pacify his dear son Duryodhan, Dhritarashtra offered the Pandavs a place called Khandavprasth. This place was once the glorious capital of the Kuru dynasty. But now it was a dense forest full of thorns and

bushes. It was home to thieves, demons, wild animals and birds. Yudhishtir knew this. Yet he accepted it. Krishn and the Pandavs left for Khandavprasth. They sought the help of Agni, the fire god, to burn down the forest. Agni set to work immediately and started a fierce fire in the forest. Soon the fire burnt down most of the forest, leaving behind only





barren land. When the fire was blazing, the Pandavs heard a demon cry out aloud, "Help me from this fire!" They took pity on him and saved him. "I am Mayasur, an architect with divine powers. You saved my life. So I will build a beautiful palace for you in return," said the demon.

Mayasur built a magnificent palace for the Pandavs. Krishn suggested naming their new kingdom Indraprasth. The gods showered their blessings on the kingdom. Indraprasth became a prosperous region. People preferred to live in Indraprasth than Hastinapur. Soon Indraprasth became richer than Hastinapur. When the Pandavs settled in the new place,





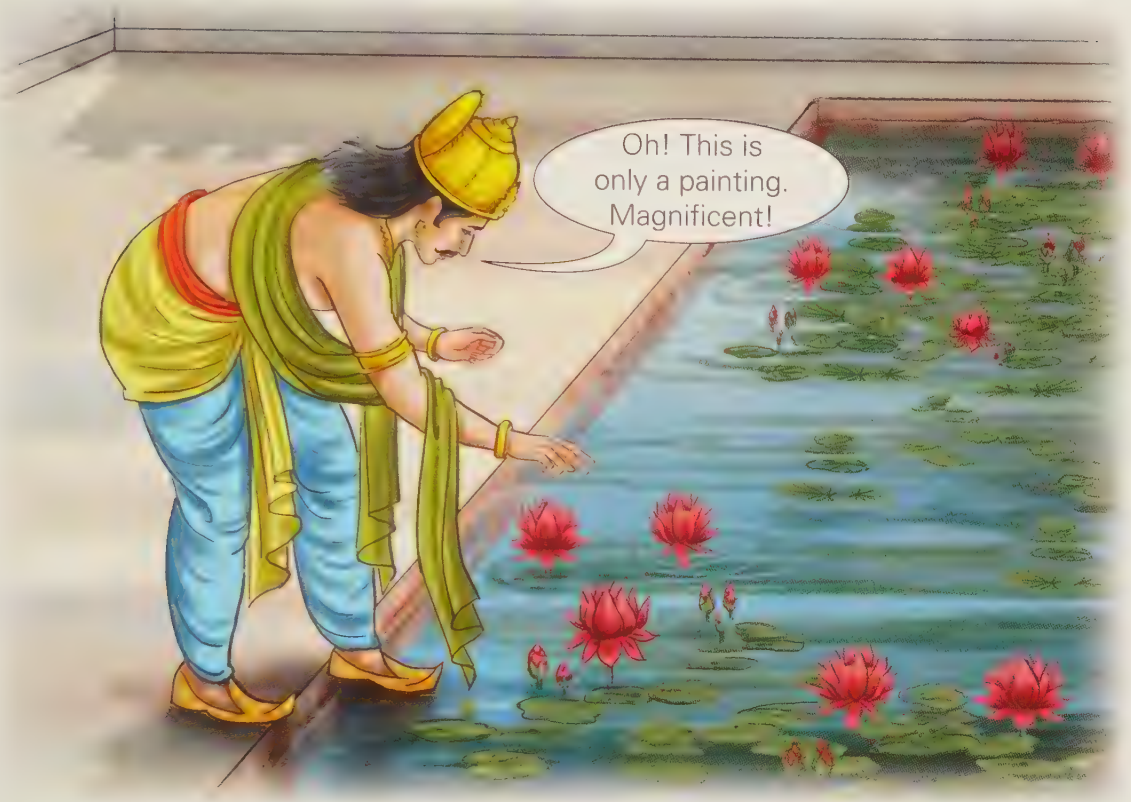
Krishna returned to his kingdom in Dwaraka. He visited the Pandavs often. Later, he got his sister Subhadra married to Arjun.

After several years, Yudhishtir performed the *rajasuyayajna*. He invited many kings including his cousins, the Kauravs, to the *yajna*. After the *yajna*, all the guests returned home except Duryodhan. He stayed back

at Indraprasth to survey the architectural marvel of the Pandavs' palace. In fact, he was secretly noting down the details so that he could copy them in his own palace in Hastinapur.

Duryodhan saw a pool with lotus flowers in the centre of the palace hall. He went near the pool and bent down to pluck a





flower. To his surprise, he realised that it was not a real pool. It was merely a painting on the floor. In fact, there were several such paintings in the palace. Duryodhan then strode into the garden. There he mistook a real pool for a painting and fell into the water.

"How embarrassing this is," thought Duryodhan. He hoped no one had seen him fall into the pool. But someone had indeed seen him. Duryodhan heard a woman laughing. Wondering who it was, he looked all around. He then looked up to see Draupadi watching him from a balcony.





"Haha! The blind son of a blind father!"
Draupadi said, laughing.

Duryodhan was extremely angry. He walked away, shouting at Draupadi, "Soon, you will pay for this!" Duryodhan returned to Hastinapur, swearing revenge on the Pandavs.



The Pandavs Go into Exile



Back in Hastinapur, Duryodhan was desperate for revenge. "I cannot see the Pandavs prosper. Their wife Draupadi has insulted me. I have to destroy them all!" he shouted. His uncle Shakuni said, "Duryodhan, we will destroy them, but without a war."

"Invite them to our palace. We will entice them to play a game of dice with us. I will help you defeat the Pandavs. One by one, you can take away all their precious possessions," he said.

Duryodhan liked his uncle's plan. Shakuni was an expert gambler. Not everyone knew that he had a pair of magic dice. The dice



showed the numbers that Shakuni wished for. "This indeed is my chance to destroy them," Duryodhan told Dushasan and Karn.

Duryodhan sent out an invitation to the Pandavs. They accepted it without hesitating. Along with Draupadi, the Pandavs travelled to Hastinapur. Bheeshm, Dron and the others were pleased to see them.





After a few days, Duryodhan invited Yudhishthir to a game of dice in the palace hall. The game was to be played in front of Dhritarashtra, Bheeshm, Vidur and the other elders. The game began. Shakuni threw the dice for Duryodhan. Since he was using his magic dice, Shakuni got the numbers he wanted. At first, Shakuni let the Pandavs

win. But after a couple of rounds, he made sure that the Kauravs won every game.

Yudhishthir lost a lot of money but he did not quit playing. "Let us play one more game," he kept saying after each game. Yudhishthir lost all his wealth; yet he continued to play game after game. His brothers Nakul and Sahadev begged him to stop playing, but





Yudhishthir did not listen to them. Finally, he lost his kingdom. Duryodhan was now a happy man. Indraprasth and the beautiful palace were now his. Duryodhan said cunningly, "Yudhishthir, you can stop playing now. But if you continue, you have a chance to win back all that you lost."

Arjun requested Yudhishtir to stop playing, but Yudhishtir ignored him. Hoping to win back their kingdom, he played another game and lost once again. This time, he had nothing more to give. So he pledged his brothers, one by one. His four brothers were now the slaves of the Kauravs. Still Yudhishtir





continued to play. Finally, he too became their slave.

This was the moment that Duryodhan was waiting for. He rose and said, "Now that you are my slaves, even your wife Draupadi is my slave. Dushasan, get her here." Dushasan left the hall. He came back dragging Draupadi into the court.

All the elders were stunned. But they remained silent. Duryodhan said, "Draupadi is no longer a queen. Remove her royal robes!" Dushasan immediately started pulling Draupadi's sari.

Dhritarashtra begged Duryodhan to stop the shameful act. But Duryodhan ignored him.





Draupadi prayed, "O Lord Krishn! Please save me from this humiliation." Krishn came to her rescue. Dushasan kept pulling Draupadi's sari but it only became longer and longer. There seemed to be no end to it. Finally, tired of pulling the unending sari, Dushasan fell on the ground unconscious.

A furious Draupadi turned to Dhritarashtra and Bheeshm and said, "I vow that I will not tie my hair till I wash it in Dushasan's blood." Bheem too vowed that he would not rest until he killed Dushasan and drank his blood. Dhritarashtra told Duryodhan, "End this dirty game now. Give back the Pandavs their kingdom and set them free."





But Duryodhan refused to do so. He said, "We will play one last game of dice. Whoever loses this game will have to go into exile for 13 years."

Everyone agreed to this. The Pandavs lost again and left Hastinapur to begin their exile.

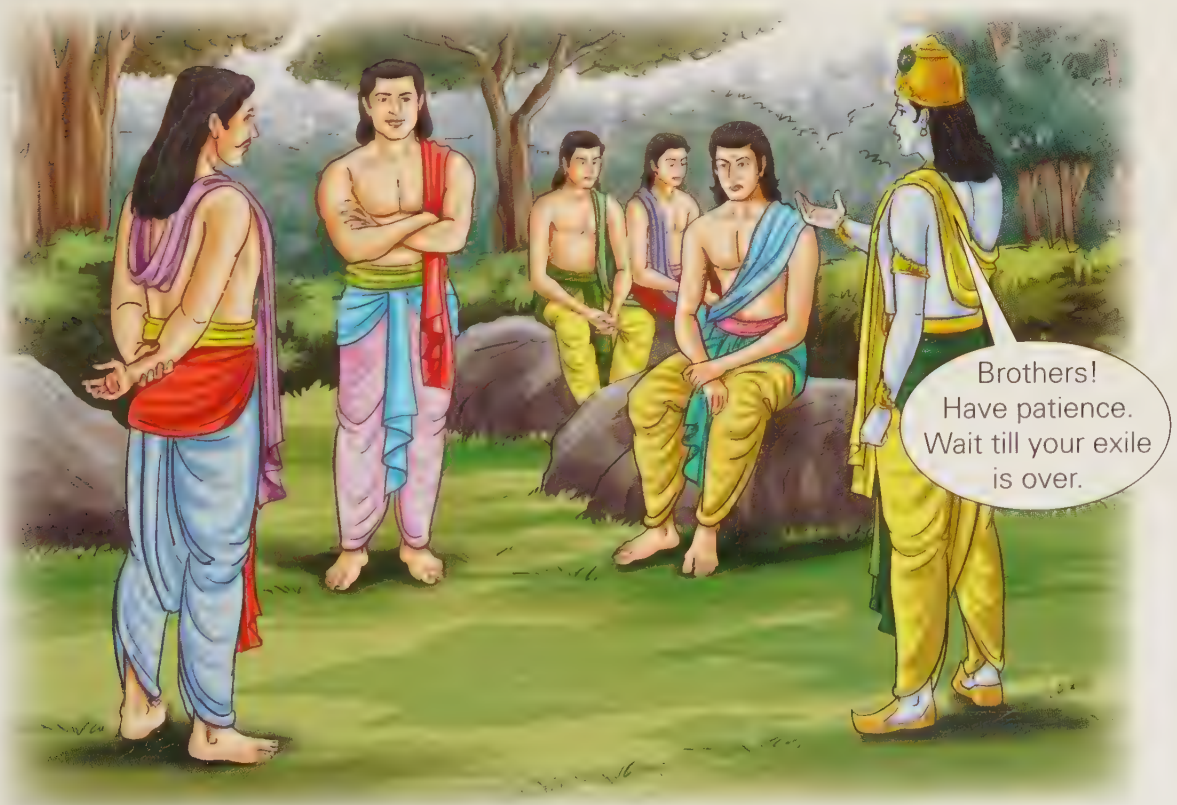


Incognito in King Virat's Palace



Once again, the Pandavs, along with Draupadi, went to the forest in exile, dressed in simple clothes. Kunti was sad but she was too old to go with her sons this time. So she stayed back in Hastinapur. Bheeshm was heartbroken, but he promised the Pandavs that he would take care of their mother.

In the forest, the Pandavs were cautious not to stay in any place for too long. They were seething with anger and wanted revenge. Krishn visited them often. He told them, "The Kauravs cheated you. You can have your revenge, but wait till your exile is over."



Krishn also told them, "Duryodhan may refuse to give back your kingdom even after 13 years. So be prepared for a war."

Sage Vyas advised the Pandavs to pray to Lord Shiv and ask for divine weapons. Arjun began to pray to Lord Shiv. After some time, Shiv appeared before Arjun and blessed him with the *Pashupatastra*.





“Use the weapon carefully,” Lord Shiv said.

Twelve years passed. The 13th year of exile had a strange rule. The Pandavs and Draupadi had to remain unidentified in the last year. If anyone found out who they really were, they would have to do another 13 years of exile. “We need to be very careful this year,” said Yudhishtir. “We will

go to the palace of King Virat. We will seek jobs in the palace and remain there for the whole year," he said.

The Pandavs and Draupadi decided how to disguise themselves. "I will become an advisor to the king," said Yudhishtir. "I will become a cook," said Bheem. "I will disguise myself as a woman and become a dance teacher to





the princess," said Arjun. "We will become herdsmen to the king's horses and cows," said Nakul and Sahadev. "I will become the queen's attendant," said Draupadi.

The Pandavs and Draupadi changed their names, hid their weapons and took up jobs at King Virat's palace. Neither King Virat nor

anyone in his palace recognised them. The Pandavs were safe in the palace.

Towards the end of the exile, the queen's brother Keechak saw Draupadi. He asked her to marry him.

Draupadi refused politely, but Keechak kept pestering her. Finally, Draupadi went to





the royal kitchen and complained to Bheem about Keechak.

That night, Bheem went to Keechak's room. Keechak was known to be very strong. But he was still no match for Bheem. Bheem killed him easily.

When news of Keechak's death reached Hastinapur, Duryodhan said, "We know where

the Pandavs are. Only Bheem could have killed Keechak. Let us attack Virat and catch hold of the Pandavs. They will have to do another 13 years of exile."

Meanwhile, Virat came to know that the Kauravs were approaching his kingdom. Yudhishtir told King Virat, "Allow me to join your army. The dance teacher, the cook





as well as the two herdsmen are also good soldiers. We were once part of the Pandav army."

Virat agreed. He knew that he was no match for the Kaurav army and he needed more people to fight on his side.

Arjun, who was driving the chariot of Virat's son, rode into the forest. There he

revealed his identity, gathered his weapons and came back to the battlefield.

The next day in the battle, the Kauravs were defeated. "Those five men are none other than the Pandavs," declared the Kauravs. "We have revealed their identity and they must go into exile once again."





But Bheeshm said that the 13th year had ended the day before the battle. "Give them back their kingdom," he said. Duryodhan refused. So, to get back their kingdom, the Pandavs decided to go to war.



The Kurukshetra War



Krishna tried to persuade Duryodhan to give back the Pandavs their kingdom. But Duryodhan refused. "At least give them a village each," advised Krishna. Duryodhan replied, "A village? I will not give them even land the size of a needle."

Then Krishn announced on behalf of the Pandavs, "The Pandavs will now fight for their kingdom. You will soon regret this decision."

Krishn did not fight in the war. But he took the side of the Pandavs and decided to drive Arjun's chariot. The gods were also on the Pandavs' side. Indra, Arjun's father, knew that only Karn was a threat to his son.



So he disguised himself as a poor brahmin and went to Karn.

In those days, when brahmins asked for alms, people never let them go empty-handed. Indra asked Karn for his armour and earrings. Karn knew that the brahmin was Arjun's father, Indra.





Yet Karn gave Indra his armour and earrings. He could now be defeated.

The battle lines were drawn. Many kings from all over the country came to support both the sides. The armies assembled at the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Bheeshm was in charge of the Kaurav army. Dhrishtadyumn headed the Pandav army.

The great war was about to begin. That is when Arjun realised the unfortunate truth. He told Krishn, "I am going to be killing my own people. I cannot do this," He got off his chariot and walked away. Krishn followed him. He stood in front of Arjun in the form of Lord Vishnu and told him, "Everyone born on earth will die one day. You are here to do





what is right and punish whoever is wrong.” What he told Arjun that day came to be known as the Bhagavad Gita.

Arjun, now enlightened, came back to his chariot. Krishn blew the conch and the war began. The armies on both the sides fought bravely. At sunset, they stopped fighting and took care of the wounded. The next day, the

battle began at dawn again. The war went on for many days. In the beginning, the Pandavs had the upper hand. But soon, the Kauravs fought back strongly. By the ninth day, Bheeshm and Dron had killed many from the Pandav side.

Krishn then told the Pandavs, "Bheeshm is their strongest warrior. We have to kill him."





Shikhandi came forward to kill Bheeshm. When Bheeshm saw Shikhandi, he knew he was about to die. Shikhandi shot an arrow and Bheeshm fell. Arjun could not bear to see his dear great grandfather fall to the ground. So he quickly made a bed of arrows for Bheeshm.

The fight continued. Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun and Subhadra, killed many in the Kaurav army. So the Kauravs trapped Abhimanyu in a maze and killed him mercilessly. Soon Dron died. Karn then came forward to fight Arjun. Both fought well and could not defeat each other. Suddenly, Karn's chariot wheel got trapped in mud. As he tried to lift the chariot





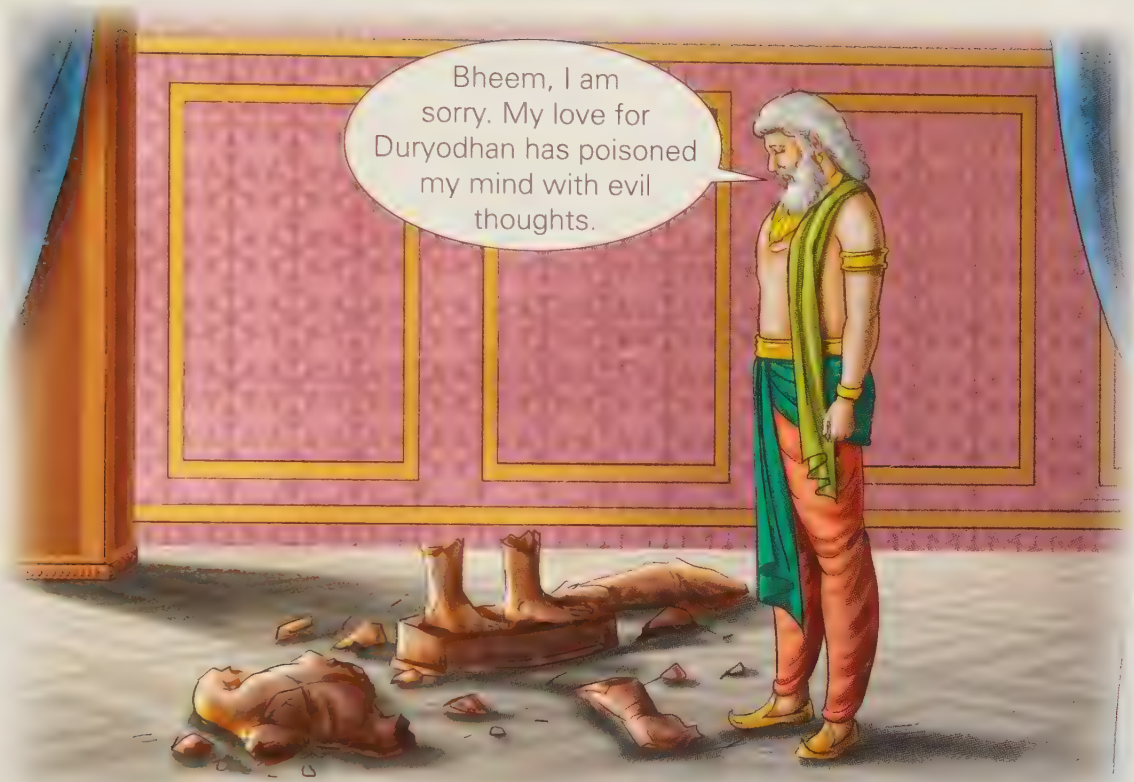
from the ground, a reluctant Arjun killed Karn. Duryodhan was shattered by his friend's death. He stormed angrily into the battlefield. Bheem fought Duryodhan and killed him. Bheem also killed Dushasan. Finally, all the Kauravs died and the Pandavs won the war.

The people of the kingdom cheered for the Pandavs. "Evil never wins over good," they said.

Everyone was happy, except Dhritarashtra. "Bheem has killed my son Duryodhan. I will not let him live," he thought angrily. Krishna knew what Dhritarashtra was thinking. So he placed a statue of Bheem in front of the blind king.

Dhritarashtra thought the statue was Bheem himself. He hugged the statue very hard and





crushed it to pieces. He then shouted, "I will kill you for killing my son!" But Dhritarashtra soon realised that he had crushed a statue. He was ashamed of himself. He handed over the kingdom to Yudhishtir and retired.

Yudhishtir, with the help of his four brothers, ruled the kingdom wisely for many years.



Meanings of Difficult Words

King Shantanu and Ganga

maiden	: a young unmarried woman
condition	: a demand in return for something else
utter	: say something
drown	: die by sinking in water
Vasus	: the attendant gods of Lord Indra
stunned	: shocked and unable to react immediately
miserable	: extremely unhappy or uncomfortable
vanish	: disappear
master	: learn to do something well

The Princes of Hastinapur

suitable	: right for a particular purpose, person or situation
swayamvar	: the practice of choosing a husband from several suitors
humiliate	: to hurt someone's pride or self-respect
unkempt	: dirty and untidy
blindfold	: prevent seeing by covering the eyes with a cloth

The Kauravs and the Pandavs

- penance** : a punishment you give yourself to repent for your wrongdoing
- ascetic** : a person who has given up all the pleasures of life
- boon** : blessing
- mantra** : a word or phrase that is continuously repeated as a prayer

The Greatest Archer of All Time

- mutter** : to speak in a low voice that is not easy to hear, often when one is annoyed
- gurukul*** : a type of schooling practised in ancient India where the students and teachers lived together
- archer** : a person who shoots arrows from a bow
- partial** : favouring one person over another
- guru dakshina*** : the voluntary fee or gift offered by a disciple to the *guru* at the end of the training

The Unknown Brother

- enmity** : feeling of hatred towards somebody
- arena** : an enclosed area used for public entertainment
- mace** : an ancient weapon with a heavy head and a long handle

applaud	: praise, compliment
feat	: an achievement that requires great courage, skill or strength
duel	: a fight between two people
charioteer	: a person who drives a chariot

The Palace of Lac

successor	: a person who takes over when the current king steps down or dies
frustrate	: upset, agitated or annoyed
architect	: a person who designs buildings
lac	: a wax-like material that can easily catch fire
restrain	: stop somebody from doing something
revenge	: to harm someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands

The Slaying of Hidimb and Bakasur

ferocious	: fierce, wild and savage-like
instantly	: immediately
dense	: thick
furious	: very angry
assure	: clarify and remove any doubt
groan	: a deep, long sound showing great pain or unhappiness
camping	: living in wilderness under a temporary shelter

Draupadi's Swayamvar

participate	: take part in
in a huff	: angry and offended

The Pandavs Build Indraprasth

due	: one's right
objection	: an argument in disagreement or opposition
glorious	: wonderful
survey	: examine something carefully
marvel	: someone or something that is impressive
strode	: walk with long steps

The Pandavs Go into Exile

prosper	: to be fortunate or successful financially
precious	: valuable or important
gambler	: one who bets money in a card game or a horse race
cunningly	: tricking others in a clever way
ignore	: pay no attention
slave	: a person who is forced to work for someone
drag	: pull somebody along with great effort and difficulty

Incognito in King Virat's Palace

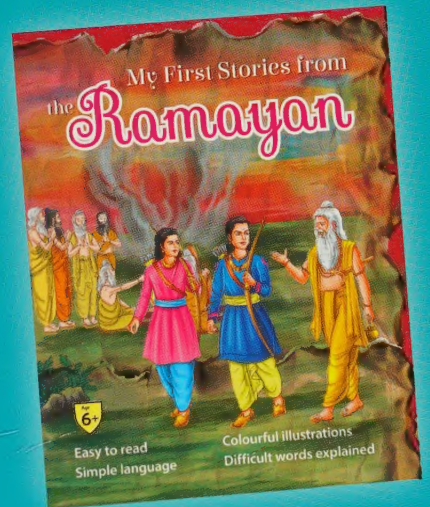
- exile** : living away from one's country, especially for political reasons
- heartbroken** : extremely sad
- cautious** : being careful to avoid danger or making mistakes
- cheat** : act dishonestly to gain an unfair advantage
- disguise** : an appearance that hides one's true identity
- pester** : annoy someone, by doing or asking for something repeatedly

The Kurukshetra War

- persuade** : make someone do something through reasoning or argument
- announce** : tell people about something officially
- regret** : feel sorry or sad that something bad has happened
- assemble** : come together in one place for a purpose
- enlightened** : showing an understanding of a situation
- upper hand** : a dominating or controlling position
- shattered** : extremely shocked and upset

ALSO AVAILABLE

My First Stories from the Ramayan





My First Stories from the Mahabharat

The Mahabharat is a popular epic that has been passed on from generation to generation in both the oral and written traditions. Retold many times in many Indian languages, there are several variations of the epic, each with its own interpretation and understanding.

This volume contains 12 important episodes from the Mahabharat, narrated in a concise manner. The incidents have been carefully selected, keeping in mind the sequence and flow of the story.

The story has been written in simple language, accompanied by colourful illustrations. The meanings of difficult words have been given at the end of the book.

Printed in large font, the volume is suitable for young readers, aged six years and above.

**Shree Book Centre**www.shreebookcentre.com

US \$19.99

UK £12.99